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TAGS: [ELTN](#) [EINV](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#) [CH](#) [KN](#) [KS](#)
SUBJECT: INTER-KOREA RAIL LINKS: WILL KIM DAE-JUNG MAKE IT
PYONGYANG?

REF: SEOUL 984

Classified By: EconMinCouns Kurt Tong, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) South Korea and North Korea have agreed to conduct test runs of two cross-border railways on May 25, some 55 years after those rail lines were cut off at the onset of the Korean War. The agreement was reached at a special three-day working-level meeting dedicated to road and railway issues held May 11-13 in Kaesong. The agreement brightens the prospects for former President Kim Dae-jung to travel at least part of the way by rail at the time of his planned trip to Pyongyang in June. END SUMMARY.

ONLY AS FAR AS KAESONG

[1](#)2. (SBU) South and North Korean railroad officials have agreed to work together to organize a test run of the cross-border tracks on May 25, using both the West Coast Kyungeui Line and the East Coast Donghae Line. These tests should not be confused with a full reconnection of the Trans Korean Railroad (TKR), however, as the test runs will cover only a small length of the tracks -- 25.5 Kilometers on the eastern side from South Korea's Jejin Station to North Korea's Geumgangsang Station, and 27.2 Kilometers on the western from South Korea's Munsan Station to North Korea's Kaesong City Station -- not advancing far into DPRK territory.

KDJ TO PYONGYANG BY RAIL: A FEASIBLE, BUT SLOW TRIP

[1](#)3. (SBU) According to the Deputy Director Kim Yong-kyu of Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation Team at the Ministry of Unification (MOU), if all the tests go according to plan, former President Kim Dae-jung's June trip to Pyongyang could possibly be accomplished by rail. In order to do this, however, Kim Dae-jung will board a South Korean train in Munsan and travel to Kaesong. At Kaesong station, Kim

Dae-jung must alight from the South Korean train, and walk approximately 100 yards north to where a North Korean train would be waiting. The rest of his approximately seven-hour, 190-kilometer trip -- at 30 kilometers per hour -- would be at the mercy of the 50-year-old North Korean rail system.

WILL IT BE SAFE?

14. (SBU) According to Deputy Director Kim, each side will carry out pre-inspections of the railways on its own side May 17-19. Once military security has been guaranteed, the two Koreas have agreed to conduct joint safety checks for their respective side's rail tracks, only one to two hours ahead of the first test runs.

15. (SBU) Kim stated the tests would proceed as follows:

- Kyungeui Line: 11:00am - 15:30pm, May 25
- Donghae Line: 11:00am - 15:30pm, May 25
- Trains: Diesel engine trains and 5 passenger cars per train on each line.
- Number of passengers: 100 for each line, including government officials and members of the press.
- DPRK delegations will travel south by bus, to Munsan and Jejin Stations respectively, on the morning of the test, and ride the test trains together with the ROK delegation.
- Rail communication will be according to agreements at the up-coming military talks.
- All necessary information for the test runs, such as railway maps and distance maps, will be exchanged prior to the test runs.

16. (SBU) The two Koreas also agreed to establish

communication networks, train operation offices and an inter-Korean committee for inter-Korean railways and roads in the near future.

ANOTHER DPRK PAYOFF IN THE WORKS?

17. (C) Before the DPRK agreed to the tests, the ROKG agreed to provide the DPRK with the necessary materials for the reconnection of the railways at an estimated cost of USD 4-6 million. Specifically, MOU's Kim told us that the ROKG agreed to provide the DPRK with additional construction materials required for drainage work near Kaesong station in the North. Kim said that the drainage system in Kaesong is more than 50 years old and in order for the Kaesong station to operate safely, all the rail tracks in the area must be removed, drainage construction completed, and then new tracks installed. Although Kim only mentioned the drainage problems at Kaesong Station, he said the ROKG had agreed to provide the DPRK with enough raw materials for the reconstruction of three stations.

18. (SBU) A few stumbling blocks remain before the railways can begin operation. Military authorities of the two sides must sign an agreement to guarantee secure passage of railroad cars and passengers on each other's side of the border. Military officers from both North and South are scheduled to meet from Tuesday to Thursday of this week at the truce village of Panmunjom. The agenda at the talks includes ways to guarantee the safe passage of those using the cross-border railways, according to Kim. The military talks coincide with the scheduled working-level inter-Korean contacts on Tuesday at Mount Geumgang, in the DPRK, to prepare for former President Kim's visit to the North next month.

COMMENT

19. (C) The first project agreed to by Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jung-il at the first Inter-Korean Summit in June 2000 was the reconnection of these two inter-Korean rail lines. Former President Kim Dae-jung has expressed his willingness to visit

North Korea via rail, and apparently the DPRK has relented. Many questions, however, still remain. The DPRK has agreed to test these rail lines many times previously, but because of last minute requests by the DPRK for huge amounts of aid the test runs were cancelled at the eleventh hour. This time the ROK and DPRK have actually chosen dates and times, a step not seen before, indicating that the reconnection of the rail lines is quite possible -- at least for the duration of the Kim Dae-jung trip. The future of these rail lines is, of course, dependent on the overall course of North-South relations.

MINTON